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TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: GERMAN CHOD EXPECTS SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TO TURN
AGAINST AFGHANISTAN MISSION

REF: BERLIN 1179

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PHILIP MURPHY. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY. At a September 29 dinner hosted by Ambassador Murphy in honor of SACEUR ADM Stavridis, German Chief of Defense GEN Schneiderhan expressed concern that with the departure of many Social Democratic Party (SPD) leaders and parliamentarians who were reliable supporters of the Bundeswehr deployment in Afghanistan, the SPD was likely to take a much more critical stance toward the mission. In fact, he anticipated that within a couple of months, the SPD would drop its long-standing support for the German engagement in Afghanistan and would start pressing for an "exit strategy" and withdrawal of the Bundeswehr. Confirming other reports, Schneiderhan said the MOD "will ask for more" German troops in connection with renewal of the parliamentary mandate for ISAF in December. He emphasized, however, that the extra troops would be dedicated to accelerating the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) rather than engaging in combat. Both Schneiderhan and Chancellery Deputy National Security Advisor Nikel strongly emphasized the need for the U.S. to make any requests for additional German contributions in private; public calls would be counterproductive. Schneiderhan also worried about the effect of the recent media reporting about NATO's increasing pessimistic view of Afghanistan and its self-doubts about the efficacy of the current counterinsurgency strategy. It gave the impression that NATO no longer believes in success. END SUMMARY.

ATLANTIC-BRUECKE DINNER

12. (SBU) Ambassador Murphy hosted a dinner on September 29 in honor of SACEUR ADM Stavridis in connection with the annual German MOD-U.S. European Command (EUCOM) conference hosted by the Atlantik-Bruecke Association. The dinner included senior German officials from both the MOD and Chancellery, including Bundeswehr Inspector General (Chief of Defense) GEN Wolfgang Schneiderhan, Army Chief of Staff GEN Hans-Otto Budde, and Deputy National Security Advisor Rolf Nikel.

ELECTION RESULTS

13. (C) At Ambassador Murphy's request, Atlantic Bruecke Chairman and former Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU) Caucus Chairman Friedrich Merz began the dinner discussion by offering a short analysis of the September 27 election results. Merz said he had frankly

expected a continuation of the Grand Coalition between the CDU-CSU and SPD and joked that he had "gladly" lost two bets on the election. He further noted that the CDU/CSU and Free Democratic Party (FDP) had a "clear" parliamentary majority, which "thank God" does not rely on the so-called "overhang" or surplus parliamentary seats (i.e., a quirk of Germany's two-vote electoral system, in which the CDU/CSU obtained additional seats beyond that justified by its overall share of the vote). While welcoming the CDU/CSU-FDP victory, he thought the SPD's collapse as a broad-based "people's party" was negative for the German political system as a whole. He expressed the hope that the new center-right coalition would have a sufficiently large and stable majority to push through needed labor, finance, tax and economic reforms.

SPD EXPECTED TO TURN CRITICAL ON AFGHANISTAN

14. (S/NF) Bundeswehr Inspector General GEN Wolfgang Schneiderhan noted with concern that only two SPD parliamentarians (SPD Defense Policy Spokesman Rainer Arnold and Hans-Peter Bartels) are returning to the Bundestag Defense Committee; the rest of the previous SPD committee members are either retiring or were not re-elected. Many of the reliable supporters of the Afghanistan policy -- SPD caucus chief Peter Struck, deputy caucus chief Walter Kolbow, foreign policy spokesman Gert Weisskirchen -- are gone. FM Steinmeier, who will replace Struck as caucus leader, is the only remaining anchor.

15. (S/NF) Schneiderhan expected the new SPD members of the Defense Committee, as well as the SPD caucus over all, to take a much more critical approach vis-a-vis Afghanistan. In

fact, he anticipated that within a couple of months, the SPD would drop its long-standing support for the German engagement in Afghanistan and would start pressing for an "exit strategy" and withdrawal of the Bundeswehr. He said that most Germans simply did not share Struck's now-famous assertion, made when he was defense minister under the Schroeder SPD-Green government, that "Germany is defended at the Hindukush."

16. (S/NF) Chancellery Deputy National Security Advisor Nikel agreed that the developments within the SPD were worrying. He noted that Steinmeier had been elected as caucus with "only" 88 percent of the vote (usually, he noted, such votes are unanimous or nearly so), indicating that his position is less than solid. Even if Steinmeier can hold on as caucus leader, there will be a new SPD party chair (Comment: Likely to be current Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel. End Comment.) and a whole new SPD leadership, which is not invested in the current Afghanistan policy.

MOD TO REQUEST MORE GERMAN TROOPS

17. (S/NF) Schneiderhan noted that since the new government coalition will not be formed until early November, there will only be one month to discuss the parliamentary mandate for ISAF before it comes up for renewal in December. Schneiderhan was surprisingly open in saying that MOD "will ask for more" German troops in connection with the mandate renewal, confirming other reports we have heard. He emphasized, however, that the extra troops (he did not provide an number) would be dedicated to accelerating the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) rather than engaging in combat.

U.S. "ASKS" MUST BE MADE IN PRIVATE

18. (S/NF) Schneiderhan stressed that public pressure from the U.S. and others to increase German contributions to Afghanistan would be counterproductive and strongly encouraged us to make any requests privately. Stressing the unpopularity of the military mission, Schneiderhan said that Chancellor Merkel would not "commit political suicide" over Afghanistan. (Comment: In a separate October 1 meeting with the DCM, Deputy National Security Advisor Nikel emphasized again the need for any U.S. request for additional German

troops for Afghanistan to be made privately. He asked that to the extent possible, we bundle our Afghanistan requests together to simplify the government's consultations with the Bundestag. End Comment.)

CONCERN THAT PESSIMISM COULD BE SELF-FULFILLING

¶9. (S/NF) Schneiderhan also worried about the effect of the recent media reporting about NATO's increasing pessimistic view of Afghanistan and its self-doubts about the efficacy of the current counterinsurgency strategy. It gave the impression that NATO no longer believed in success. He said that Afghans were certainly aware of this attitude and wondered if this would make them less willing to commit to the Afghan government and ISAF forces in the counterinsurgency fight for fear of ending up on the losing side. Schneiderhan complained about proposed plans to double the end-strength goal of the Afghan National Security Forces (i.e., ANA plus police) to 400,000 only six months after the current goal was endorsed at the Strasbourg/Kehl NATO Summit. This would be hard to explain to parliamentarians and once again gave the impression that NATO did not know what it was doing.

GERMAN STRATEGIC CAVEAT ENABLES PARTICIPATION

¶10. (S/NF) On the issue of national caveats, Schneiderhan made a distinction between strategic and tactical caveats. He called the restriction of German combat troops to the north of the Afghanistan a "strategic caveat," without which there would be no German deployment at all. He also questioned the efficacy of efforts to pressure Germany to send 500 or so troops to the south of Afghanistan when the operational impact of such a deployment would be marginal at best. Deputy National Security Advisor Nikel agreed that without the geographic caveat restricting the Bundeswehr mostly to

the north, there would be no German troops in Afghanistan.

NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

¶11. (S/NF) Nikel also defended the call by Chancellor Merkel for an international conference on Afghanistan, noting that a new agreement on international engagement was needed to replace the existing London Compact, which expires in 2010. He emphasized that it was important for the new compact to include concrete benchmarks for success and to require the Afghan government to do its part. The level of ambition had to be lowered to give ISAF contributors the hope of completing the mission in the medium term.

COMMENT

¶12. (S/NF) Schneiderhan's assertion that the MOD will recommend an increase in the German troop ceiling when the parliamentary mandate comes up for renewal in December confirms what we have heard privately from other German officials and recent media reports. While Schneiderhan declined to give any specific figures at the dinner, the most recent reports are that the government is considering raising the troop ceiling to as high as 7,000, significantly up from the current 4,500. There are now some 4,200 German troops deployed in Afghanistan. The willingness of the traditionally cautious MOD to contemplate such a significant increase in the number of troops reflects how seriously the security situation has deteriorated in the north over the past year and, at the same time, how seriously Germany takes its responsibility for securing the northern region. While Germany has strongly resisted any efforts to get it to deploy combat troops outside the north, it has also prided itself on "taking care" of the north and filling all the force and training requirements there.

¶13. (S/NF) However, if Schneiderhan's nightmare scenario comes true, and the SPD swings decisively against the Afghanistan deployment in the near term, this will obviously complicate the new center-right government's effort to gain approval for the increase in the troop ceiling in December,

especially since the Germans like to pass the parliamentary mandates for their troop deployments with large, comfortable majorities. Another complicating factor could be the ongoing U.S. review of the McChrystal assessment. Some opponents of the ISAF deployment could seize on that to argue that Germany should not contemplate any troop increases until the strategic way ahead in Afghanistan is clear.

Murphy